

# *The forgotten history of forgetting*

Presentation by Wim Schlebaum



Heracleitus by Johannes Moreelse. [~1630]

The image depicts him as "the weeping philosopher" wringing his hands over the world, and as "the obscure" dressed in dark clothing—both traditional motifs

*All things are flowing,  
Sage Heracleitus says;  
But a tawdry cheapness  
Shall outlast our days.*

Ezra Pound, in 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberly' (1920)

Herakleitos, pre-socratic natural philosopher and cosmologist from Ephese [535 BC] *Panta rei*: one cannot step twice into the same river. Cosmos is the eternal, not created, living fire, as is the soul's embedding in the ever changing cosmic web of fire, lightning fury waxing and waning in cycli. By his doctrine of Logos as 'unity of opposites', he denies the principle of non-contradiction as hold by Aristotle, for united both release their paired impetus simultaneously into transition, up and down the same path, like the bow's tension moves the arrow. He is the grand-father of dialectics [as acknowledged by Hegel, Marx and Lenin]

According to his radical follower Kratylos, as staged by Plato in his dialogue, we cannot even step once into the same river, since everything is changing there is no constant being, he holds against the Eleatics (Parmenides, Zeno). For example, once my foot is immersed into the river the water flows from toe to heel, but as a natural sign it cannot signify the same stream when other parts of the body are immersed and neither can the whole body.

For W. James the only present with experiential reality is the specious present: '...the original paragon and prototype of all conceived times is the specious present, the short duration of which we are immediately and incessantly sensible.' (1890: 631) In another formulation he enters into more detail, and says something about what this short duration contains:

In short, the practically cognized present is no knife-edge, but a saddle-back, with a certain breadth of its own on which we sit perched, and from which we look in two directions into time. The unit of composition of our perception of time is a duration, with a bow and a stern, as it were – a rearward – and a forward-looking end. It is only as parts of this duration-block that the relation of succession of one end to the other is perceived. We do not first feel one end and then feel the other after it, and from the perception of the succession infer an interval of time between, but we seem to feel the interval of time as a whole, with its two ends embedded in it.

*(Principles of Psychology, 1890: 609–10, quoted in Wikipedia)*

Following James' notion of the specious present '...as a whole, with its two ends embedded in it' for a while we'll leave its duration underdetermined as a working heuristic, as a 'go-between' bracketing off all empirical content and focus on its borders as opposite transitions. These two ends are in our [informal] reading: just(now) and next(now) as fringes of the specious **noww**.

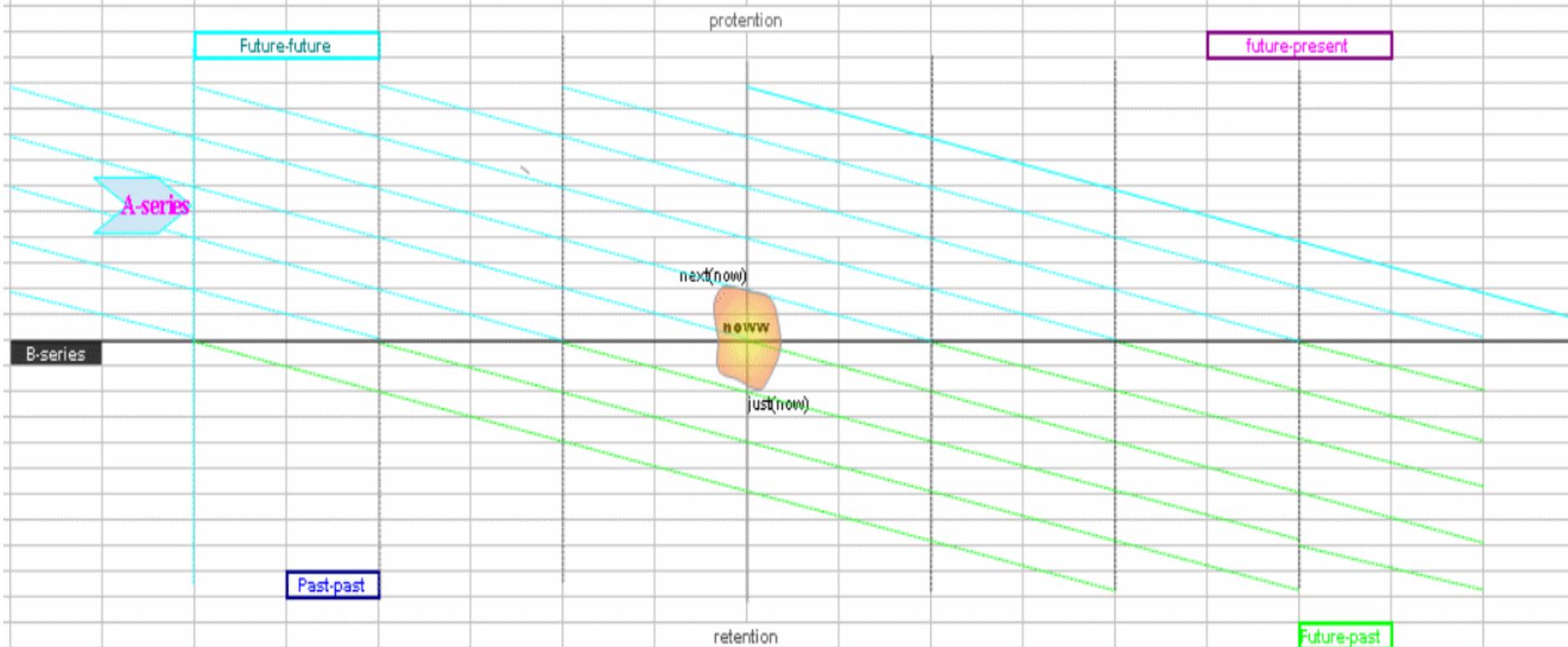
“The duration thus steadily perceived is hardly more than the 'specious present', as it was called a few pages back. Its *content* is in a constant flux, events dawning into its forward end as fast as they fade out of its rearward one, and each of them changing its time-coefficient from 'not yet,' or 'not quite yet,' to 'just gone/ or 'gone/ as it passes by. Meanwhile, the specious present, the intuited duration, stands permanent, like the rainbow on the waterfall, with its own quality unchanged by the events that stream through it.” [James 1890, p.630]

This embedding mentioned earlier which fringes into just(now) and next(now) is not static but itself in motion [flux]. In other words, unlike James we don't need to focus on the specious present in order to preserve its presentness, for ***motion guarantees*** its presentness and newness as is our stream of consciousness, so we shall see later in our diagram.

Now-in-motion [**noww**] catches two flies in the same strike, so to speak: On the one hand it preserves the presentness of the specious present and on the other hand its renewal. Since noww is specious it is never completed—in order to complete it has to become non-specious, or perfected in the infinite—[then motion stops: i.e. there is no next(now)]. In other words, 'now' is incomplete *in virtue of its progression*, for its completion is driven by the next(now) which is not quite yet now. But when it actualizes the same holds for this 'now' about to come again and so on, ad inf.

*—Inner Time-consciousness—*

Husserl's schema enhanced



now = go-between ['handshaking']

Mc Taggart's Paradox: Time is illusion

No absolute now [in the universe]

Consider a single A-series then conceived as a partitioned time-space [Past-Present-Future]. According to McTaggart any event determined at a fixed interval within the B-series, which are dependent on the A-series, as they are essential for our notion of time as change. Since the event passes from the Future through the Present into the Past, It is in all three of them at once. However, Past, Present and Future are mutually exclusive and cannot co-exist, holding the same event, which then is present, is past and in the future. Therefore contradiction: so time is an illusion!

**noww** = simultaneity of asynchronicities

The counter-argument that the event is not simultaneously in the future, past and present is not valid for simultaneity presupposes time already and so is circular.

# ***Abstraction of Time***

We can only perceive change if our perceptual apparatus does not change by the perceived change in the same way.

However, when our perception of change changes itself it does also change the perceived change, but we miss this 'change of change' in our successive perceiving acts as naive realists.

Once we are awake our being-in-time is inescapable and therefore simultaneous with the flow of time. Awareness of this flow would not perceive the flow from the outside, at a certain distance so to speak, for that will take us outside our very being, leave self-consciousness by the same (token-reflexive) token behind. In other words, we cannot take the position of an a-temporal being, that is outside time, but only have awareness of time from a (intra)temporal perspective. i.e. Inner time consciousness (Husserl, 1991).

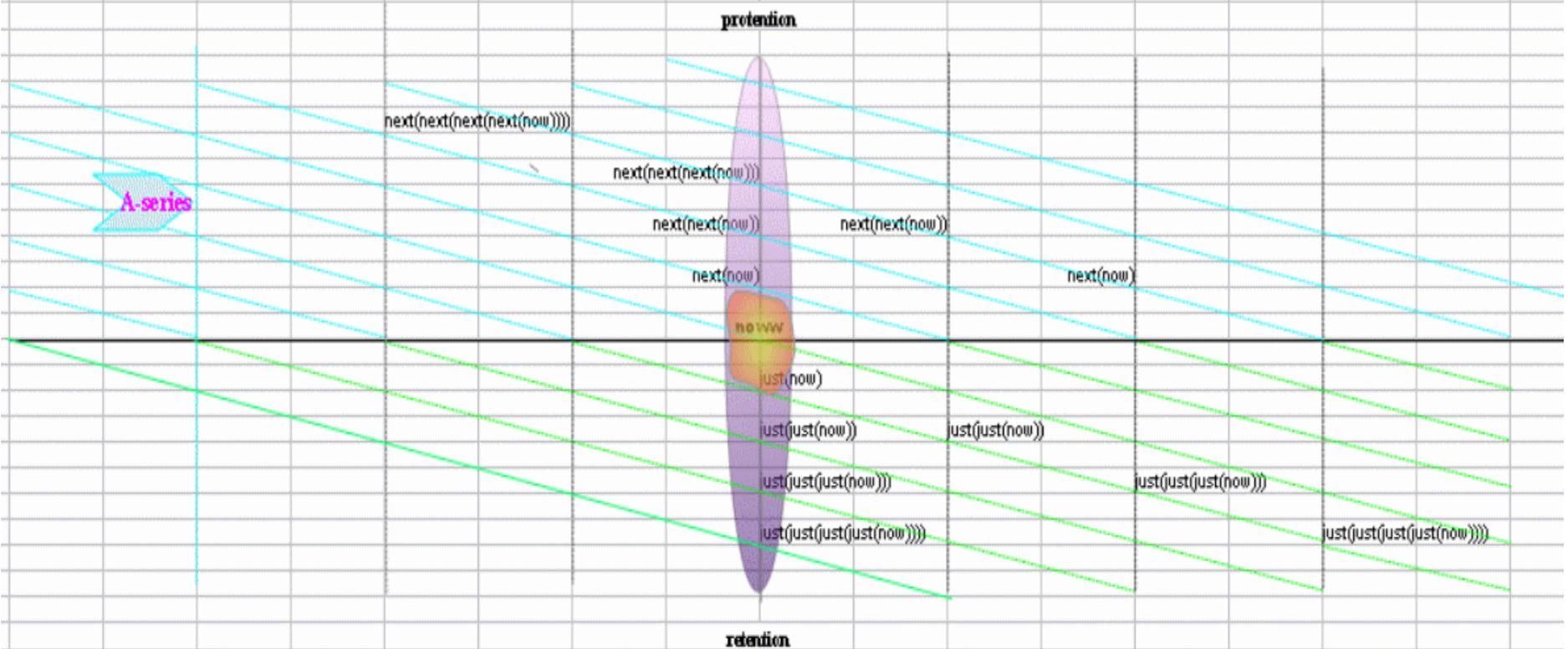
However, in that case how do we perceive 'change of change'?

My preliminary answer would be as a first step of abstraction, that our time consciousness is multilayered by default as a 'synchronicity of asynchronicities', which we can take as a generalization of James' specious present (**noww\***).

Let me explain this basic notion more in detail by the next diagram, which is an extension of Husserl's diagram (1928/1964, Husserliana X):

*—Inner Time-consciousness—*

Husserl's enhanced scheme



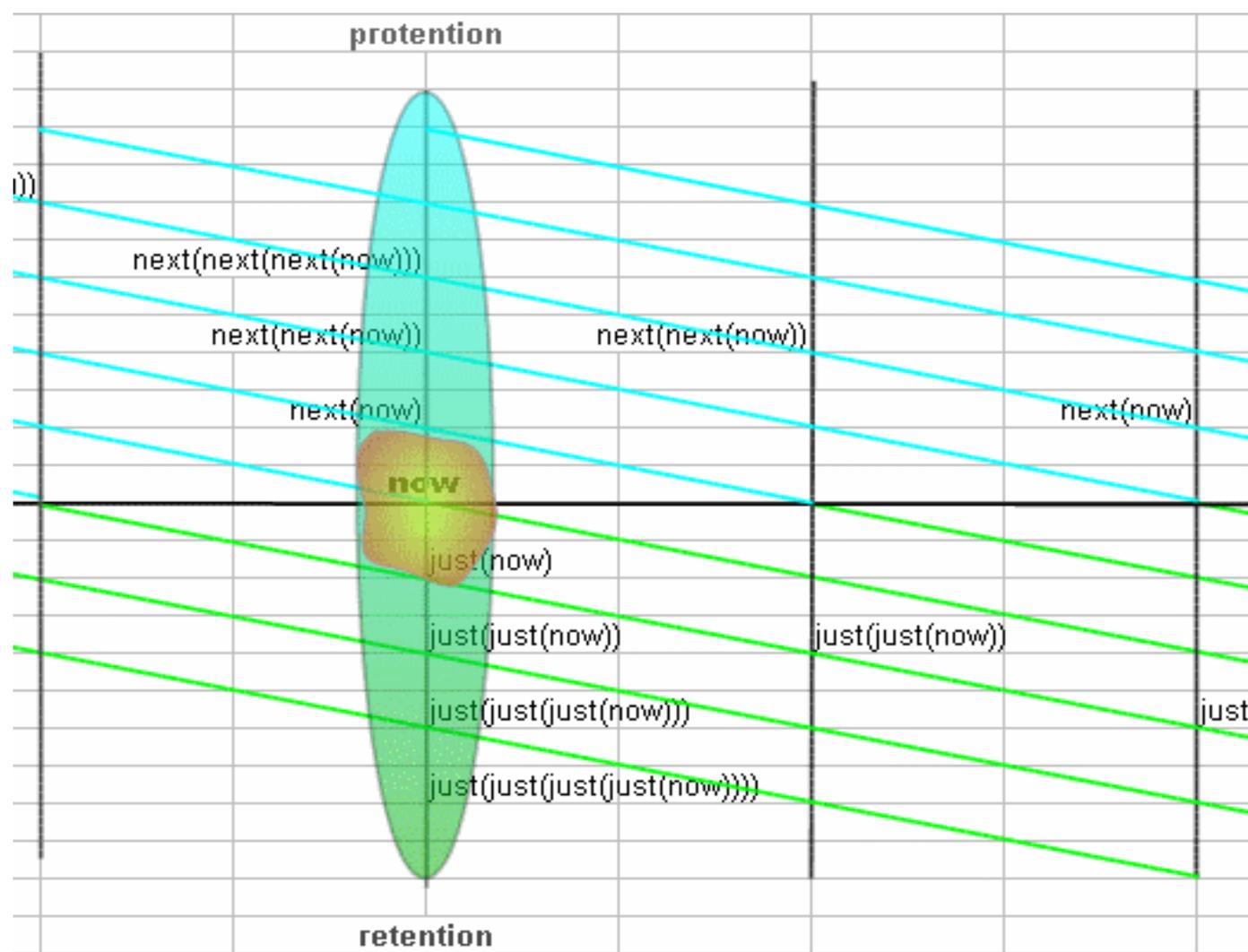
Our inner time-consciousness is multilayered as represented by the colored ellipsoïde stretched between protection and retention.

**Now** = in-between just(now) and next(now)

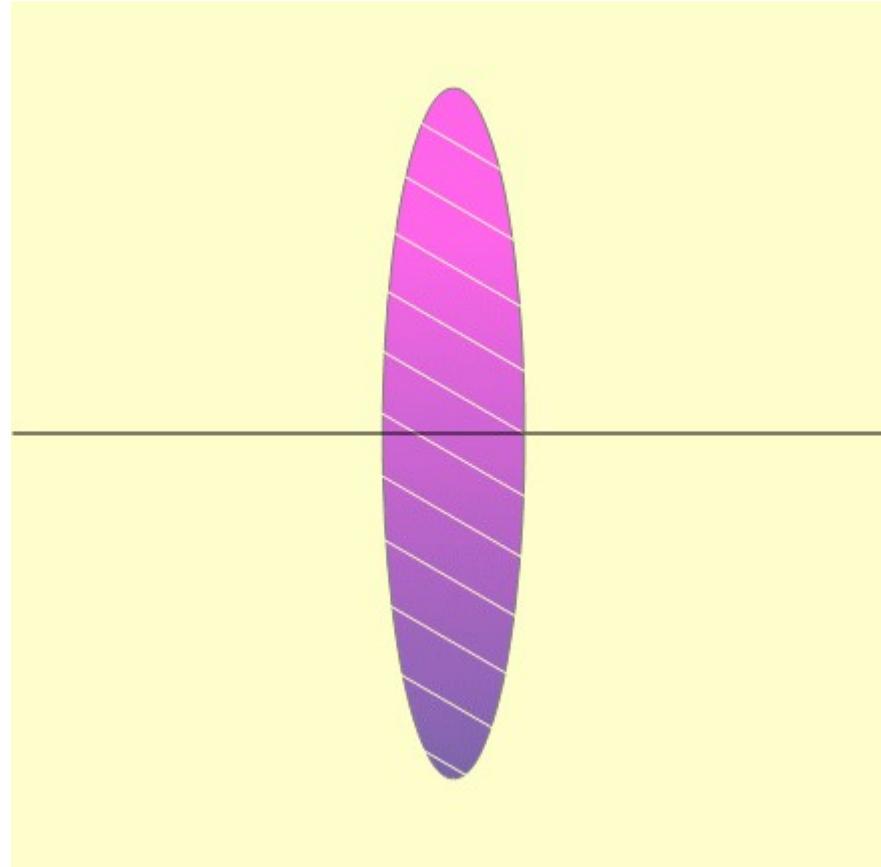
**noww** = gelijktijdigheid van ongelijktijdigheden

**Noww** = simultaneity of asynchronicities

Note that McTaggart's paradox holds only for a single-layered time-consciousness. Within a multi-layered time-consciousness Past and Future are captured already as different mutually asynchronous layers. Once Past and Future co-exist while maintaining the present asynchronicity of the constituent layers, the paradox gets off the hook. Even more so the more async the layers are stretched by protection and/or by retention. In other words, resolving the paradox [in wider resolution] is in fact the driving force behind the motion of time (!) as shown in the next slide.

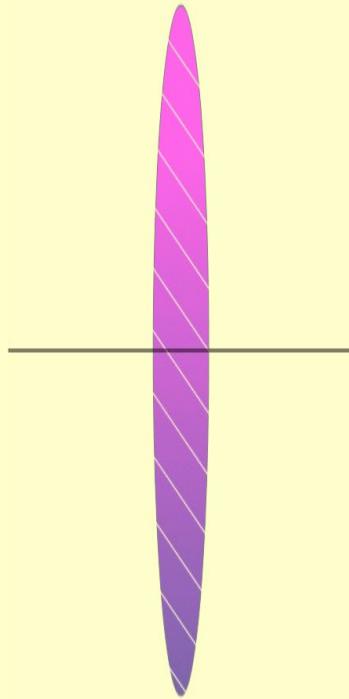


protection

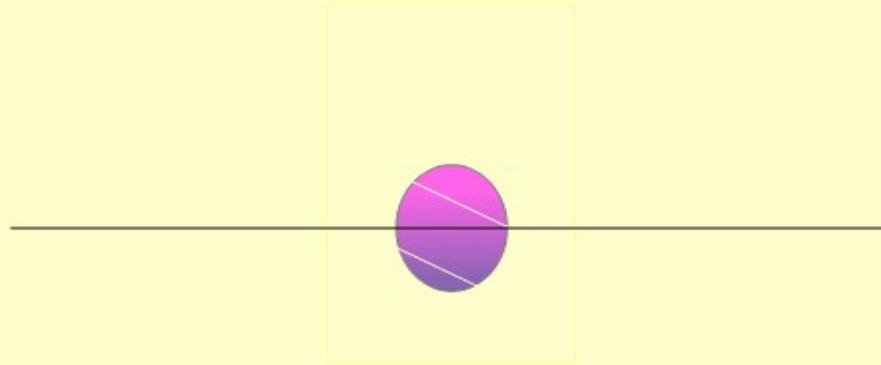


retention

*Autistic case*



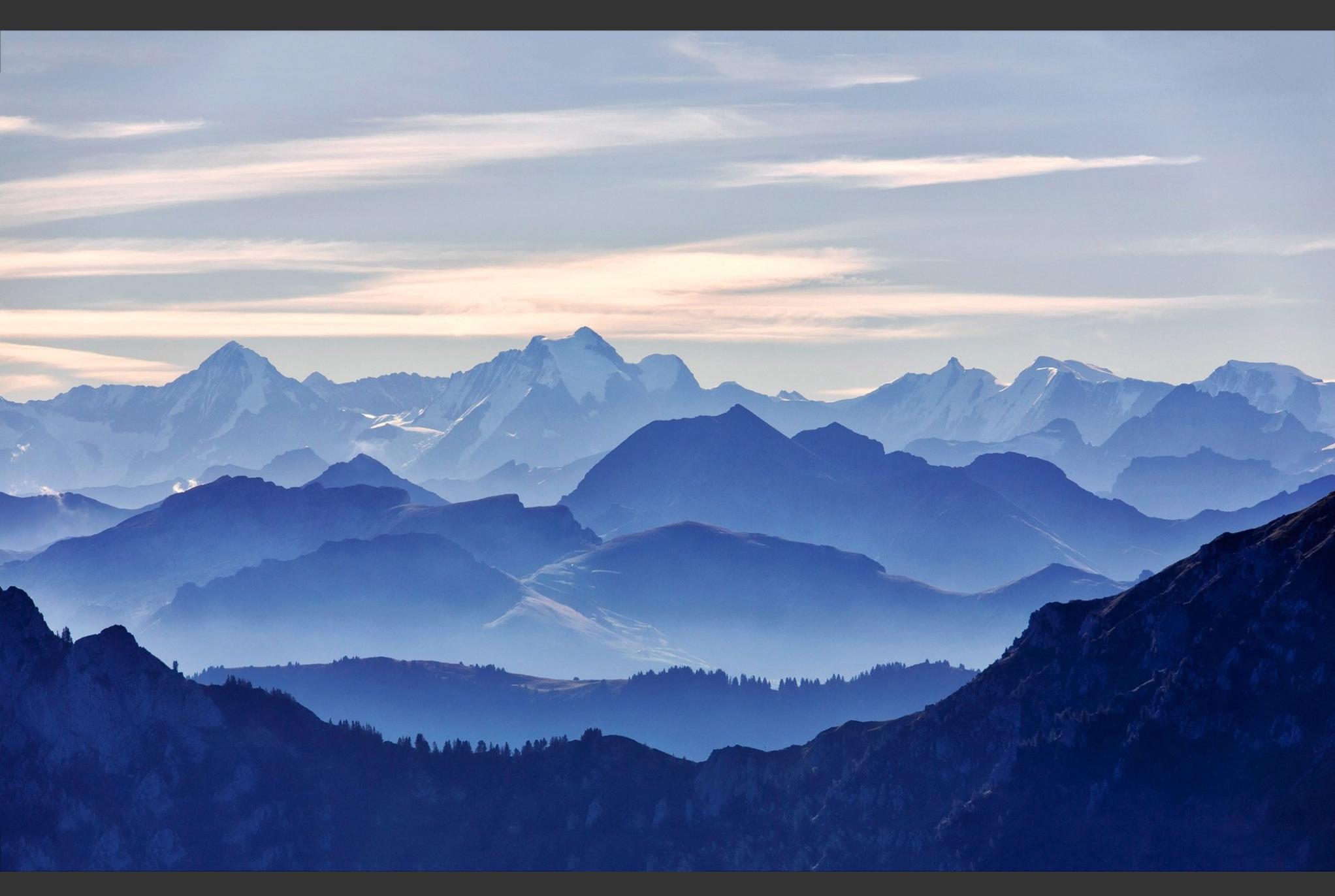
## *Alzheimer case*



When the top line sinks to the bottom the whole becomes async with itself and if so it cannot hold distinct asynchronicities any more. So it has to resync, looking forward as 'synchronicity of asynchronicities' by continuing its flow of time-consciousness .



3-Mont-Sainte-Victoire-3-Paul-Cezanne-Mountain



**narrative(object) → direct representation**

Examples are *Direct cinema* approach, *Cinema Verité*, etc

**narrativ(narrativ(object)) →> indirect representation**

In this case the first order relation between the narrative and its object is weakened by the second order narrative in which it is embedded.

As a meta expression the second order narrative rules over the embedded first order narrative and thereby suppress its main representational function. In other words, the altering bond of the narrative with its direct object gives way to a new bond, which we perceive as a change of meaning, not expressible in the language of direct narratives, and so an enrichment of the film language would be possible in principle.

However, extending the higher order narrative as 'narrative of narratives' would no longer be meaningful when the bond with its direct object gets loose for then in the end the representing function of the narration fails.

## ***no narration without representation***

Since narration is bound to representation one can reasonably doubt whether a 'narrative of narratives' makes sense at all.

Extending non-linear change into multi-level ordering of narratives will not get us rid of its representative character altogether and therefore the concept of narration is limited from the outset. In fact it is the final impediment to motion in film as mode of expression at different levels of abstraction in our effort to set free the *Lingua franca* of film from narration as its notorious 'cul-de-sac' in the next slides.

Because of this representational dependency —though it can be weakened to a certain extent as we saw above— in case the narrative's direct object is missing, like 'presence in absence' as in Hitchcock's *suspense* or in Straub-Huillet's *Chronik AMB*, e.g. Bach's vampiric possession of Gustav Leonhardt as performer not as actor, such gradients or shifts in meaning are not expressible within a narrative context.

So let's skip narration as a basic concept of making and understanding film (as hold by JML Peters and D. Dennet) and start at a non-representational level from scratch, as worked out by Van de Staak in '*From the work of Baruch d'Éspinoza*'.

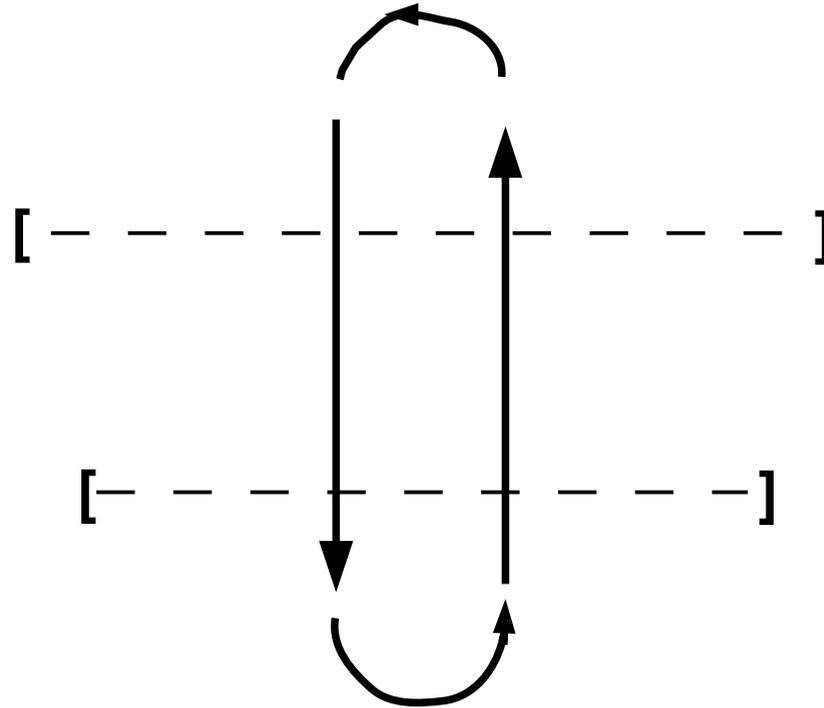
More specifically he formulates his two-sided approach as a continuous cycle —indirect-direct-indirect-etc. In the 'indirect' phase the directedness of the former (direct) phase is then 'redirected' towards the next direct phase, and so on. In other words, in the indirect phase the real transition takes place, which is growing cycle after cycle and drives each cycle to its culprit or direct(ed)ness, like an iceberg in reverse.

For this endeavour he invented his 'scoping' technique by which a scene and its continuation take scope over another scene and its continuation, which take scope over another scene...and so on. So the depth of the scope is also its culprit.

From our perspective of double-sided simultaneity scoping ranges not only over 'atomic' change but over 'change of change' as well and that includes shifts of meaning, which are not preserved as if in 'no man's land of meaning'. In other words, shift of meaning then is not enforced by directedness, but on the contrary is evoked or induced by *non-directedness* of width (from wide to narrow or vice versa) of scope.

Scenes which take no scope over others have null or empty scope. Scenes from which (possibly multiple-) scoping starts are not within the scope of other scenes and so function together with the zero scoped scenes as turningpoints in our 'paperclips model' [as is demonstrated below]. Scenes in between are scoped by and also have scope over others. A scene which is neither scoped nor has scope over others is either atomistic or unsplittable (continuous).

[ **non-directedness** ]  
Wide scope



[ **Directedness** ]  
Narrow scope

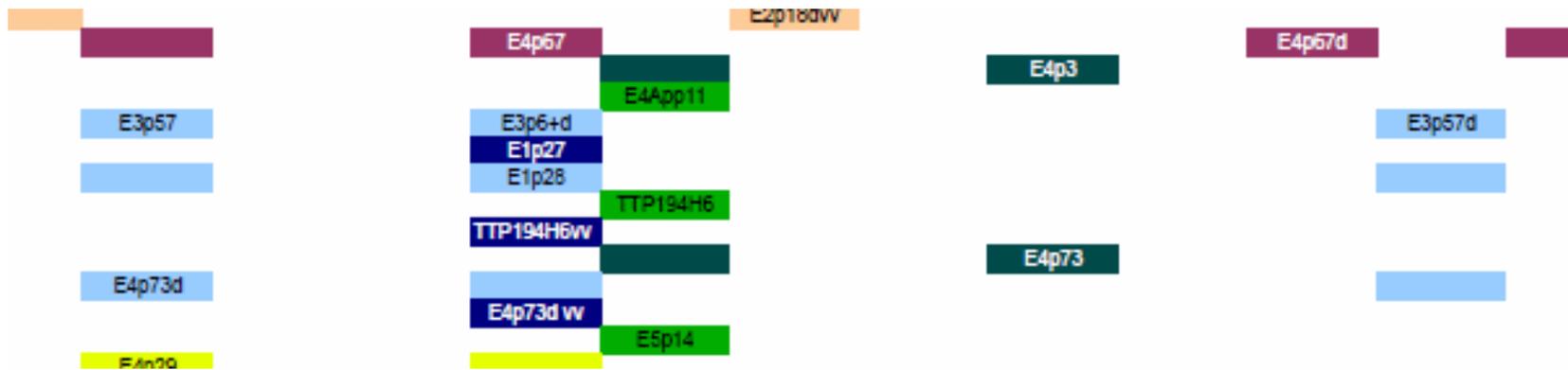
The general idea of (possibly infinite) change as transition from one simultaneity to the next, is then that if scoped this inherits its two-way (in)directedness from double-sided simultaneity only.

As we can see in the next slide the widest scope is the most indirect [non-directed] and as we proceed downwards to the narrower scope (inside the wide scope) some directedness comes in [and less indirect ] as a simultaneous double-sided development. The narrowest scope at the bottom is the most directed, although not final, but a transition phase towards indirectness again, and so on, so the cycle continues at another level.

Furthermore, expressing a thought within the scope of the previous one closes the former, and the same holds for the latter when it takes scope over the next thought, and so on. So scoping delays closure, which enables intertwining of slight shifts of meaning which cannot be captured by any narrative approach. Indeed in his way towards enrichment of film language Van de Staak is able to express quasi-dialogues beyond their surface and/or deep structure as Spinoza's 'rhythm of thoughts'.

As a live example of what is going on we have reconstructed a graphic representation of Van de Staak's alleged 'musical score'.





In this fragment you see the turkiose blocks representing the scene with two women sitting at the table [en face] reading first text E4p3, as an instance of 'simultaneity of change', in demonstrating our first step of abstraction we mentioned earlier. [shortcut:  $\text{sim}(\text{change})$ ]

The scene is continued after a while by reading E4p73. As parts of a whole this takes our **second step of abstraction**, since simultaneity of the first step is itself changed. Labeling this as parallel montage misses the point, because the scenes in-between are not at the same [linear] level, but embedded or scoped. We can now quasi formalise the two steps together into **one** expression:

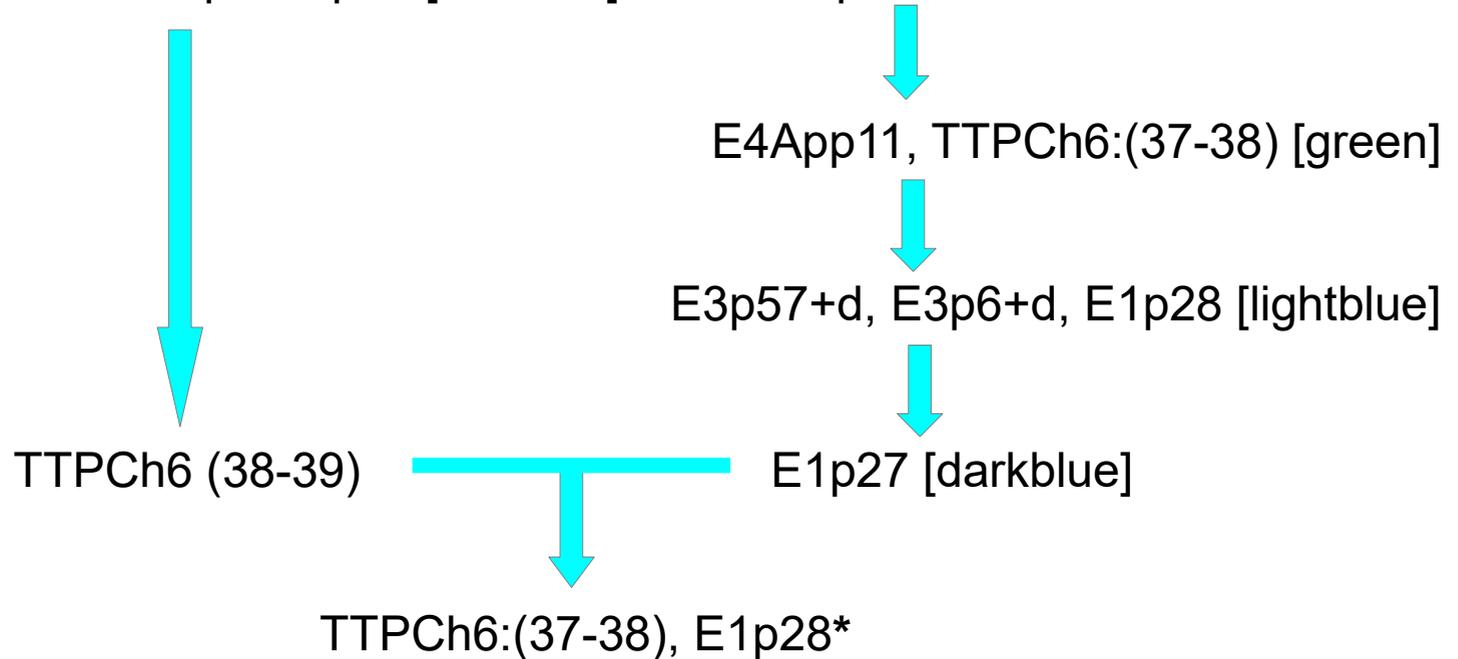
**$\text{sim}(\text{sim}(\text{scene}))$**  [scope —see note\*]

\*In this recursive notation the length of the expression also represents the depth of the recursion. For example scene E1p27 is embedded within E4p3-E4p73 as  $\text{sim}(\text{sim}(\text{sim}(\mathbf{E1p27})))$ . So the same scene continued can have different depths, dependent on what went before and what follows it, like in a changing rhythm.

# Scope (meta-rhythm)

wide → narrow

Scene E4p3-E4p73 [turquoise] takes scope over scenes



\*In the last case E1p28 is scoped by E1p27 at the 4<sup>th</sup> step, which was earlier within the former's scope at the 2<sup>nd</sup> step: so both are bound by mutual scope. TTPCh6(37-38) is scoped twice: at the first and 4<sup>th</sup> step, so **indirectly** scoped by itself as is E1p28 and so its closure is delayed (by 'jumping' via E1p27).



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nhsa3o4i7Dw>

## ***Choreography of thinking*** ***Multiple scope and delayed closure***

A thought outlasts its finite expression.

Two thoughts with both empty scopes cannot succeed each other. Thoughts expressed in the primary scope are closed by the next thought within its next subscope. Again, the same holds for this next thought, and so on, etc.

The primary scope as a whole is not closed by itself, but by the next primary scope, which is not in its subscope. And again, the same holds for this next primary scope, and so on, etc., etc..

Finally, the last thought is closed by the film as a whole, that is to say, grasped as an eternal expression of the disclosed world, we live in.

The so-called 'rhythm of thoughts' cannot endure by jumps of thoughts only, but must be sustained by a continuous 'stream of thoughts' without which the rhythm would collapse, like the waves cannot outlast the surface at which they ruffle. So this stream or flow is our 'innermost time-consciousness' as the foundation of the rhythm constituted by and coexistent with the self(re-)creating subject, hence in so far its political commitment persists it is necessarily free.\*

**Frans:** Being as it may, since my youth I was interested in this man. By the way he persisted in life. There is a kind of harshness in the manner of his thinking, working out his thoughts, patterned in a rhythm, which is unique. And in my view this rhythm is also present in the film. [...]

Well, to return to Spinoza's texts: I have designed their form like a musical score, which is performed before the camera. And when this happens, then you observe how far these texts resist the present world of sounds. For every sound one can hear at the location of shooting, like cars, people, birds, planes, wind, acts as a disruption of the text. [...] Because the text is always spoken in a social environment, it comes out as a kind of dialogue... that is to say, a quasi-dialogue

**Johan:** It seems to be a distribution, doesn't it? By distributing the text over a strict number of people you make it a common property.

**Frans:** Exactly. In virtue of the quasi-dialogue a kind of meaning is added. The same text is uttered by different persons, and the one expresses it with more insight, has more trouble or feels more about it than another person. And that is why the meaning is changing constantly.

Well, you see...this has to do also with my treatment of the text like a musical score.

For the complete interview Johan van der Keuken with Frans goto:

<http://www.atelierfransvandestaak.nl/english/pub/JvdSen.pdf>



Rembrandt, *The Young Rembrandt as Democritus the Laughing Philosopher* (1628-29)

## ***Cacophony of Time***

However this rhythm is not just as if represented in the film, but as its basic composition —like Germaine Dulac's *Symphonie visuelle*— i.e. cacophonically inherited from its own dynamics and timing in the non-representationalist sense of what Van de Staak calls 'Spinoza's unique rhythm of thoughts': so itself *unique* in the strong sense of strictly *not literal identical to Spinoza's rhythm*, but only metaphorically.

“The films are what they are thanks to the work that went into them. (...) And a majority of the work, before and during filming, has to do with avoiding clichés; blowing them up, ‘dynamiting’ them. There is a word that’s no longer in use, that has become a cliché: It’s about dialectics. Damn! The point is that you can never say or show something where the possibility of resistance from its opposite cannot also be sensed.” [Jean-Marie Straub]

'In true boogie-woogie I see a trend akin to my own destruction of melody, construction by continual opposition of pure expressive means: Dynamic rhythm.'  
(Piet Mondrian)

Here we see how the most abstract level coincides with the most concrete, like Heracleite's unity of opposites at the level of microcosmos, as Van de Staak says:

*“Desire is the utmost, when its representation is the least”*

Non pas un rêve,

Mais le monde des images lui-même entraînant l'esprit où il n'aurait jamais consenti à aller, le mécanisme en est à la portée de tous.

Not a dream, but the world of images itself taking the mind where it would never have agreed to go;  
the mechanism is within everyone's grasp.

La coquille et le clergyman/composition visuelle  
*Germaine Dulac* The Seashell and the Clergyman (1927)

“It isn’t enough  
to simply capture reality  
in order to express it  
in its totality;  
something else is necessary  
in order to respect it entirely,  
to surround it in its atmosphere,  
and to make its moral meaning  
perceptible . . .”



- Germaine Dulac (1882-1942) on *Integral Cinema*